



JESSE JAMES

State Representative • 68th Assembly District

October 7, 2019

Emergency Mental Health Treatment in Wisconsin: Why we need to address the issue now.

We have a growing mental health problem in Wisconsin. We lack the resources needed to help people in crisis. Through Chapter 51 of the Wisconsin State Statutes, a person may be determined a harm to themselves and/or others, this is commonly referred to being “chaptered”. Once a person is chaptered they are detained and transported to a hospital where they are evaluated and placed into a secure environment where they can get the treatment they need. This is called an emergency detention.

Due to the lack of resources, and financial strain, fewer and fewer hospitals are taking emergency detention patients. This leads to increased pressure on the hospitals that do take emergency detention patients. Currently, a majority of patients from the Chippewa Valley go to Winnebago Mental Health Institute. In 2018, 774 patients (20% of total intake) were admitted to Winnebago from the 29 counties in the northwest region. At Winnebago, the average stay for a patient is 9 days, at a cost of nearly \$1,300 per day. These costs are absorbed by the patient’s home county.

Even more concerning is the lack of services for the children in Wisconsin. The majority of hospitals in our state do not take children because they do not have the resources needed for them. When a child in the Chippewa Valley is determined to need emergency detention, and the area hospitals are full, they are also taken to Winnebago Mental Health Institute. This takes the child much farther away from their family, and support system.

I, along with other area legislators sought to find a solution to this problem. Senator Kathy Bernier and I introduced a \$15 million budget motion for the 2019-2021 biennial budget. The motion was adopted, and approved by the Legislature, but vetoed by Governor Evers. Governor Evers wanted to use the \$15 million for Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center in Madison. More money for Madison, and northern Wisconsin is forgotten about again. If it isn’t for Madison or Milwaukee, just forget about it.

Senator Bernier and I then introduced Senate Bill 405/Assembly Bill 443. This bill would provide a one-time, pilot program grant of \$15 million to HSHS-Sacred Heart Hospital and St. Joseph’s Hospital to expand their psychiatric beds for emergency detentions. These two hospitals were chosen after conversations with many area healthcare providers.

This proposal takes advantage of existing resources, existing infrastructure, and provides a solution to this growing crisis. No new buildings, just remodeling and new beds. Currently there are 21 adult beds at



JESSE JAMES

State Representative • 68th Assembly District

Sacred Heart, this would expand to 33 beds. Their 8 juvenile beds would transfer to St. Joseph's Hospital, which would expand to 18 total juvenile beds.

Expansion of psychiatric beds in Eau Claire, and Chippewa Falls will relieve the pressure that Winnebago is feeling and eliminate nearly 20% of their patient intake. A solution and partnership which would benefit all of Wisconsin

###